



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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October 20, 2006

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director
Paul Trudeau, Preservation Administrator

Re: D-1086: Wyeth (Lennox) Hall, 1595 Massachusetts Avenue (1931)
D-1087: Baker House (Dr. D. Gilbert Dexter house), 1587 Massachusetts Avenue (1875)
D-1088: Ukrainian Center (Dr. Alden Keene house), 1581-83 Massachusetts Avenue (1876)

Applications to demolish Wyeth Hall at 1595 Massachusetts Avenue, to relocate Baker House at 1587 and to demolish its attached carriage house, and to relocate Ukrainian Center at 1581-83 Massachusetts Avenue were received on October 11, 2006. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for November 2, 2006. The fourth building on the site, the Everett Garage (1969), is less than fifty years old and is not subject to the Ordinance.

Harvard Law School proposes to clear the site to allow construction of a single new building. The Ukrainian Center and Baker House are to be moved to a new site at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Mellen Street, with the former facing the avenue and the latter facing Mellen Street. The carriage house currently attached to Baker House is to be demolished, as are Wyeth Hall and the Everett Garage.

Site

The buildings are located on the east side of Massachusetts Avenue, between Jarvis and Everett Streets, north of Cambridge Common in Old Cambridge (see attached Sanborn map). The Ukrainian Center at 1581-83 Massachusetts Avenue and Baker House at 1587 Massachusetts Avenue are three-story Second Empire frame houses. Wyeth Hall at 1595 Massachusetts Avenue is a five-story, L-shaped, Georgian Revival brick dormitory. It is abutted by the five-story Everett Garage, which is accessed from Everett Street on the north side of the property.

The Ukrainian Center and Wyeth Hall are part of a large parcel containing many buildings owned by the Harvard Law School (Map 157/Lot 30). Baker House, also owned by the Law School, is sited on a 10,916 square foot lot (Map 157/Lot 33). All three buildings are in a Residence C-3 (multifamily) zone. This zone allows any-

thing from a single-family house to a high-rise building containing more than one hundred dwelling units. Residence C-3 districts permit transient residential uses (such as hotels) and institutional uses (schools and hospitals), as well as a limited amount of office space in residential buildings. The zone permits an FAR of 3.0 and has a height limit of 120 feet.

Both Baker and Ukrainian houses have ample setbacks with moderate-sized front yards and ample back yards now mostly taken up for parking. Wyeth Hall and the Everett Garage are built up against the Massachusetts Avenue sidewalk, with a small landscaped entranceway at the southern ell of Wyeth Hall. Neighboring properties include Harvard's Pound Hall at 1563 Massachusetts Avenue, a five story brick and stone building constructed in 1968, and 1607-17 Massachusetts Ave, a single-story commercial brick storefront row constructed in 1914. Buildings across the street include 1600 Massachusetts Avenue, a seven-story brick apartment building constructed in 1981, and 1622 Massachusetts Avenue, a four-story brick Georgian Revival apartment building constructed in 1925.

Architectural Description

Ukrainian Center (Dr. Alden Keene house), 1581-83 Massachusetts Ave., is a three-story, four-bay Second Empire double house that was constructed in 1876. It sits on a granite foundation and has clapboard walls and a straight mansard roof that flares at the bottom where it meets the eave. Details include a wide cornice and eaves bracketed with modillions, gabled dormers, two-story, three-sided bay windows with scroll-sawn brackets supporting the eaves, and corner boards ornamented with single diamonds. Window treatments are notably elaborate, with pedimented and label-molded window heads and carved, decorative casings on the front and side facades. All windows have two-over-two double-hung sash. The double entrance on the front (west) façade features an elegant portico with columns, brackets supporting the entablature and eaves, a diamond-patterned cornice, and flat roof. Two sets of half-light, wood paneled entrance doors with transoms complete the entranceway. The roof towers over each bay window demonstrate a Queen Anne influence. Cast iron cresting is found at the top of the mansard roof between two brick chimneys. The side facades (north and south) are identical in detail, each with a small entranceway covered by a bracketed shed roof, and two-story bay windows. The site also features decorative granite curbing along the sidewalk.

Baker House (Dr. Alden Keene house), 1587 Massachusetts Ave., is a three-story, two-bay Second Empire single-family house that was constructed in 1875. It has a granite foundation and was built with wood clapboard walls and a slate-shingled, straight mansard roof. A 20' x 20' ell was razed in 1981 to make way for a larger addition in 1983, which involved moving the carriage house and building a new connector to the main house. The building boasts a wide cornice and eaves with decorative paired brackets, gabled dormers with double windows, and window heads with variations of ornamental scrolling acanthus leaves. The front (west) façade features an elaborate portico with square columns, bracketed eaves, wide cornice with modillions, roof balustrade, and half-light, wood paneled entrance doors with transoms. Tall, narrow, paired windows with rounded heads dominate the façade, with the primary first floor window having a bracketed gable hood.

The south façade features a two-story bay window with paired brackets on the original portion of the building, with a side entrance and small portico on the 1983 addition. The portico has paired square columns, bracketed eaves, and a



Ukrainian Center, 1581-83 Massachusetts Avenue (photo by Paul Trudeau)



Baker House, 1587 Massachusetts Avenue (photo by Paul Trudeau)

balustrade on the flat roof. The entrance has ornamental paneled doors, sidelights, and a row of small transom windows. Decorative granite curbing and a wrought iron fence run along the sidewalk in front.

The carriage house was moved and connected to the main building in 1983. It has similar detailing, with a mansard roof, gabled dormers, and clapboard siding; the cupola betrays the building's original function as a stable, although it now contains offices. A tall, narrow gable intersects the mansard roof over the stable door, which has a bracketed hood. The north façade reveals a single-story bay window and a single round-arch window. The sash in one of the first floor windows has been filled in by clapboards, although the bracketed hood remains in place. The original stable door has been replaced, and shutters have been added on the south façade.



Baker House carriage house (photo by Paul Trudeau)

Wyeth Hall (Lennox Hall), 1595 Massachusetts Ave., is a five-story, L-shaped brick Georgian Revival building designed by Boston architect Manning Waters that was constructed in 1931. Wyeth is a characteristic example of the Georgian Revival institutional and apartment buildings that was common in the early 20th century. The building lacks elaborate detail, but typical Georgian Revival features include the flat-arched windows with keystones, corner quoins, symmetrical windows, and projecting stone belt course. The most noticeable Georgian Revival feature is the recessed front entranceway at the building's L-junction. The door and transom are capped by a Classical entablature with dentils, which is supported by engaged Corinthian columns; directly above is a double-window with similar Classical detailing, as well as a large arch with a fanlight design and curved keystone and a wrought iron balcony. A small T-shaped vestibule faces Massachusetts Ave. This has a gabled entrance with engaged Tuscan columns, a wide entablature, and sidelights flanking the door. Other features of the building include first-floor arched windows, tripartite windows, brick belt courses, and brick roof parapets that repre-

sent chimneys. The left (north) façade is shielded by the parking garage, which was built in 1969.



1595 Massachusetts Avenue (photo by Paul Trudeau)

Current Conditions

The two Second Empire wood frame buildings appear to be in very good condition. Ukrainian Center has some areas of paint failure, and the asphalt shingles on the mansard roof show signs of deterioration. Moderate paint failure is also evident on Baker House, as well as minor deterioration of the slate roof. Both buildings need minor clapboard repairs. The architectural details, including window trim, brackets, cornices, etc., have been well maintained. Considering their age, these two properties appear structurally sound and show few signs of significant neglect or disrepair.

The five-story brick Wyeth Hall building at 1595 Massachusetts Ave also appears to be in very good condition. There are no signs of significant mortar failure, and pointing has been maintained. There is noticeable paint failure on the Georgian detailing at both front entrances, but the woodwork has not been compromised. Windows appear to be in good condition, and there are no evident signs of structural/foundation defects.

History

The regions north of the Cambridge Common were originally vast farmlands established in the early 17th century. This rural setting remained relatively unchanged until the early 19th century, when the construction of new roads and bridges enabled easier access to Cambridge from Boston and other towns to the west. The Common became a meeting point of major roads to Lexington and Watertown, and the Concord Turnpike brought more activity to Old Cambridge. Horse-drawn

streetcar service became the primary contributor to further growth on Massachusetts Avenue (then North Avenue) north of the Common, with the first service beginning in 1856 from Harvard Square to Porter Square. Another influence was the Harvard Branch Railroad, a short-lived line with a station near the Common that operated from 1849 to 1855.

Although a major thoroughfare, Massachusetts Avenue north of the Common did not see a great deal of residential construction until the mid-19th century, when small subdivisions were laid out in the Lower Common, Avon Hill, and Agassiz neighborhoods. For over 200 years, Massachusetts Avenue was considered a country road that served as a route for farmers from outlying towns to bring their produce into Cambridge. By the 1870s, a series of widely spaced mansions were constructed on the street, a consequence of the direct routes to Boston and eastern parts of Cambridge by horsecar and train lines. Because of the increasing ease of commuting, many residents of these houses worked in Boston.

The land on the east side of Massachusetts Ave between Jarvis and Everett Streets was originally part of a 14-acre farm assembled by Nathaniel Jarvis between 1765 and 1788. His heirs subdivided the place in 1861, and six lots came into the possession of the Reverend Leonard Jarvis Livermore; a group of Harvard alumni acquired the back lots in 1867 for a recreation ground to replace The Delta, the site of Memorial Hall. Livermore's lots went on the market in 1870.

Dr. Alden Keene, a physician, purchased a lot in 1873 and had the double house at 1581-83 Massachusetts Ave built three years later. The building remained in the Keene family for several decades before becoming a dormitory for the Sargent School of Physical Education around 1928. The Sargent School became a part of Boston University in 1929 as the Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. The house briefly went back to residential use before it was acquired by Harvard University in the mid-1950s to house the Harvard Economic Research Project, an ongoing study by Nobel Laureate Wassily Leontief. The Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute currently occupies the building.

D. Gilbert Dexter, another physician, purchased the lot at 1587 Massachusetts Avenue in 1873 and had a home built in 1875. He sold the house two years later to the Woodman family. Edward Ordway acquired the house in 1896, and sold it to Dr. David C. Dow in 1921. Dr. Dow, a physician and Middlesex County Medical Examiner, had his office in the building. Dow's son, Dr. David C. Dow II (1903-1999), moved into the house and began practicing with his father in the office there in the early 1930s. When his father died in 1942, Dr. Dow II succeeded him as Medical Examiner. In 1967 Dow was the first doctor in Middlesex County to diagnose a case of bubonic plague. Dow sold the building to Harvard University in 1978, and the Law School began renovations around that time. The renovations were funded by a donation from Leon Baker, a class of 1949 Law School alumnus, for whom the building is named today.

Dr. Dudley Allen Sargent founded the Sargent School of Physical Education in 1881 while he was director of the Hemenway Gymnasium at Harvard University, and relocated it to this area in 1904. The Sargent School became part of Boston University in 1929, and in 1931 B.U. razed an 1853 Greek Revival double house at 1595 Massachusetts Ave in order to make way for Lennox (now Wyeth) Hall, a new dormitory.

In 1958, B.U. relocated the Sargent School to Boston and sold the entire physical plant to Harvard University.

Harvard acquired an 1856 brick row house at the south corner of Everett Street and Massachusetts Ave. in the late 1950s and demolished it in 1961 for a parking lot. The Sargent School's 1888 house at 3 Sacramento Street became a cooperative dormitory for Harvard undergraduates, and Sargent's gymnasium and an attached 1875 Second Empire field house were razed for the Everett Garage in 1968. Wyeth Hall was acquired by the Law School and still serves as a dormitory.

Significance and Recommendation

The Keene and Dexter houses at 1581-83 and 1587 Massachusetts Avenue are significant for their associations with the development of Massachusetts Avenue north of Cambridge Common. Once a wide country road, North Avenue (as it was known until 1896) became a prestigious upper-middle class suburban address, thanks to new modes of transportation. With the construction of numerous attractive mansions fronting the street, Massachusetts Avenue was a grand boulevard at the end of the 19th century. Its demise as a desirable residential address was a result of continued improvements in transportation, notably the electrification of streetcars in 1889 and Cambridge's late adoption of zoning in 1924. Of the 69 mansions on Massachusetts Avenue at the beginning of the 20th century, only 9 remain. Most were replaced by apartment buildings and storefronts in the period 1914-1930. The Keene and Dexter houses are the last two contiguous significant 19th-century residences on the avenue. The two buildings are also significant for their architecture. Both are exceptionally well-maintained examples of the popular Second Empire style of the period, and each demonstrates aspects of the emerging Queen Anne style.

Wyeth Hall is significant for its association with the Sargent School of Physical Education, which was founded by Dr. Dudley Allen Sargent, an early innovator in physical education.

The construction, history, and occupancy of all four buildings (the two houses, the carriage house, and Wyeth Hall) relate to the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social development of Old Cambridge. It is the staff recommendation that the structures be found significant under the demolition delay ordinance.

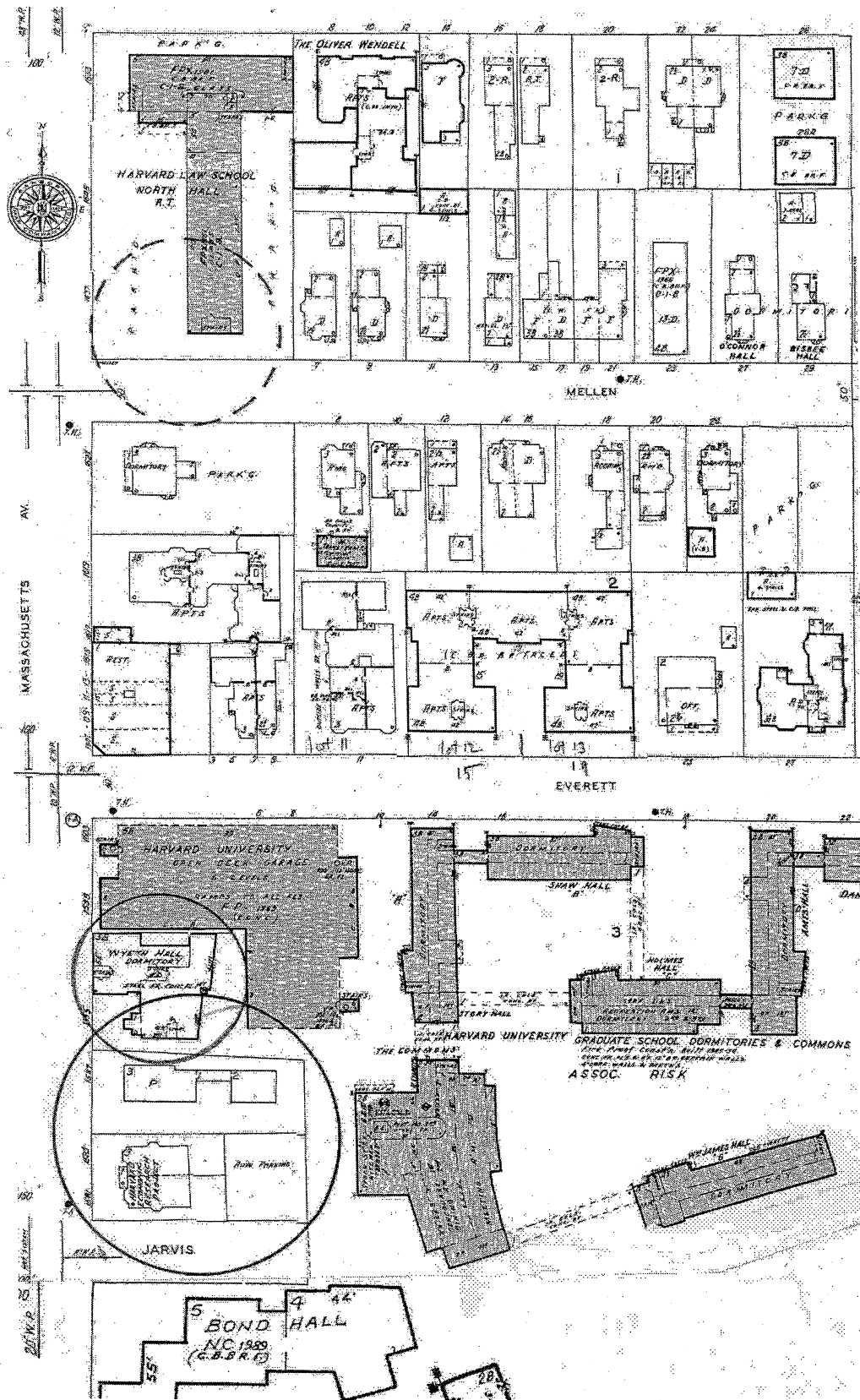
The staff has met repeatedly with representatives of the Law School and the Harvard Planning Office as this project has evolved. The staff has pressed the university to demonstrate that the two houses cannot be accommodated on their present site; to justify their removal by finding a new site that preserves not only the houses themselves but also their associations with Massachusetts Avenue; and to defend the demolition of the carriage house. The Commission will have to determine whether the public interest justifies the relocation of the houses and the demolition of Wyeth Hall and the carriage house. We consider the proposed site to be an appropriate one under the circumstances, but further efforts should be made to relocate rather than demolish the carriage house.

If the Commission accepts Harvard's proposition with regard to the two houses, we recommend that the Commission find them 'significant and preferably preserved'

under the ordinance, the six-month delay to be suspended when the University has obtained all the necessary permits both for the move and for the construction of the new building. This finding should include a condition that approval of the details of the site planning, landscape, and restoration of the two houses be delegated to the Architect's Committee, with the understandings that the relocation will include significant site features and that the restoration will be carried out to the highest standards. If Harvard accepts these conditions, we will recommend that Wyeth be found 'not preferably preserved.'

Finally, we note that plans call for the new building to be attached to Harkness Commons, a structure listed as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Review of the details of this connection should be delegated to the Executive Director .

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, ISD



Sanborn Map of Cambridge, 2002. Proposed site of houses shown by dashed circle.